

'Melfield baffles the experts'

By
JAMES C. WILFONG, JR.

When Mrs. John J. Raskob died in July, 1963, the obituary datelined Tucson, Arizona, recounted that she had been a native of Queenstown, Maryland.

The reference brought to mind the inclusion in the spring of 1949 of Pioneer Point on the annual program of the Federated Maryland Garden Tours. This was then the Raskob's Eastern Shore Estate and its 1842 acres laced by lighted paved private driveways and gardens more than a quarter mile in extent made this a highlight of that year's tours, despite the competition of Blakeford, The Hermitage, Readbourne, Wye Plantation and Bloomingdale.

Memorable tour

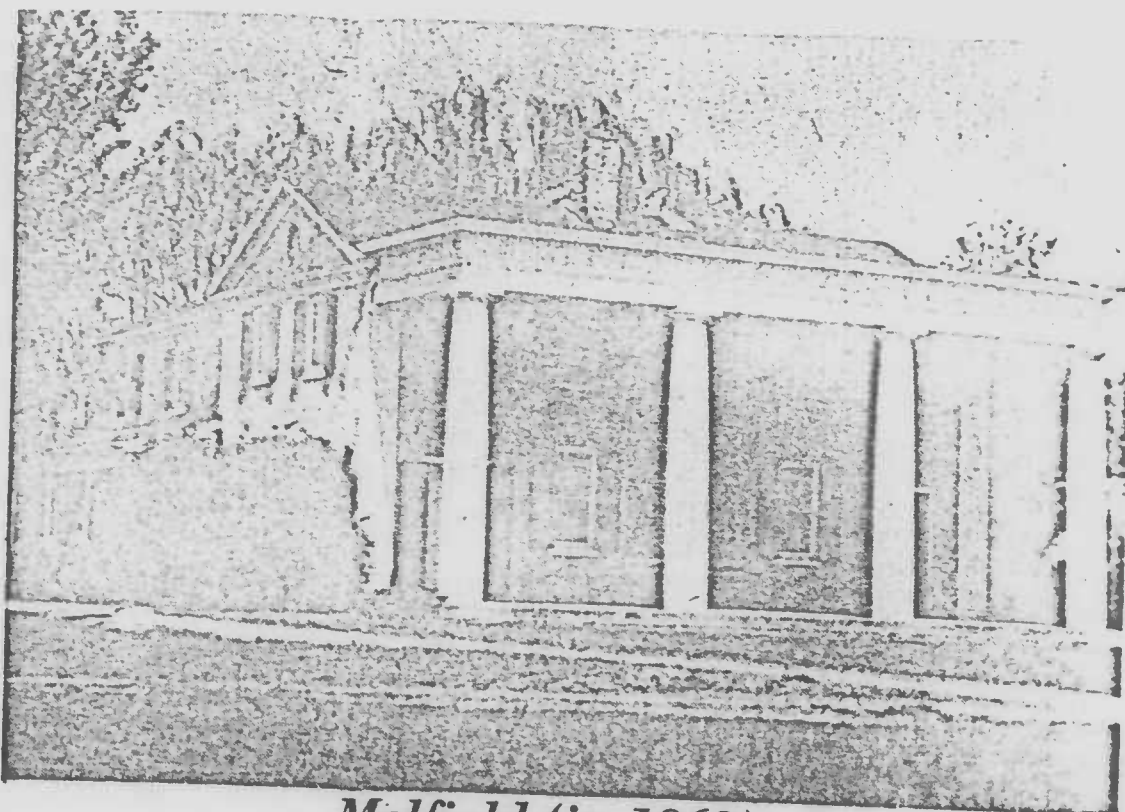
That year—1949—could have noted an all-time high in the matter of scheduling of Maryland's great mansion houses, certainly as far as this area was concerned. Those who participated in Queen Anne's tour that year will not have forgotten the many wonders they witnessed on that day.

Another, witnessed but briefly because it was not included in the formal program, stands on the road from Centreville to Pioneer Point, clearly seen from the highway and probably as provocative to the casual tourist as any others examined in detail that day.

This is Melfield, noted in references as an Earle home and notable for two centuries or more for a variety of valid reasons. Melfield baffles the experts: even Dr. Henry Chandlee Forman, dean of the architectural historians, dates it only as "Eighteenth Century," although he cited the post construction of the kitchen as proof of its antiquity. His floor plan in his *Early Manor and Plantation Houses of Maryland* tells much of interest. This ancient room, built around a massive fireplace to challenge any in its capacious opening is today the rear room of a series of four whose total length from front to rear reaches seventy feet. That the mansion is more than half as wide tells something of the generous overall size of the house. The kitchen alone measures 18 x 21 feet, to delight a housewife of any period.

Melfield unique

Melfield has something found in very few of the recorded homes of Maryland—a stair tower, to be seen at Clover Fields in Queen Anne's and at Troth's Fortune and Coombsberry in Talbot. This is simply a separate room with the primary function of carrying the principal stairway from



Melfield (in 1963)

first to second floor.

Melfield also has a curious layout of rooms to hint strongly that it is a product of several eras, all dating from early times. As a long rectangular building the kitchen is at the rear. In front of this is a one time parlor, a third or more deeper than the kitchen. These two once formed the total structure. The hall, or stair tower, appears next and this is roughly 15 x 20 feet with a generous fireplace on the long wall facing the stairs. Ahead of this are the two areas, living and dining rooms, which end to end create the 39 feet 4 inch width of the house. A central chimney, unusual in a Maryland home of such early date, serves the two back-to-back fireplaces. Today,

then, the dining room at the front must be 30 feet from the kitchen entrance and fifty or more from its rear door. Between the two is a vast area to traverse in serving any meal.

Striking building

References have called the two story Doric portico an addition to the Civil War period. Today, Melfield is a striking building, almost a neo-Parthenon in the Queen Anne's meadowland. A vast oak tree to rival old Wye in its 150 foot spread stood on the front lawn a generation ago to further awe the passing traveler. This is gone, now, but others are thriving to take its place in another century or so.

Meanwhile, a hundred feet in front of the house and just west of the driveway is one of those quaintly fascinating adjuncts so often seen in the Tidewater region: in this instance the old Earle family cemetery. It holds more than Earles; Tilghmans built the house and Tilghmans lie here, too. There are generations of Earles and a scattering of other names including a Forman child, provocative in that neighbor parent appears to lie here.

Changes noted

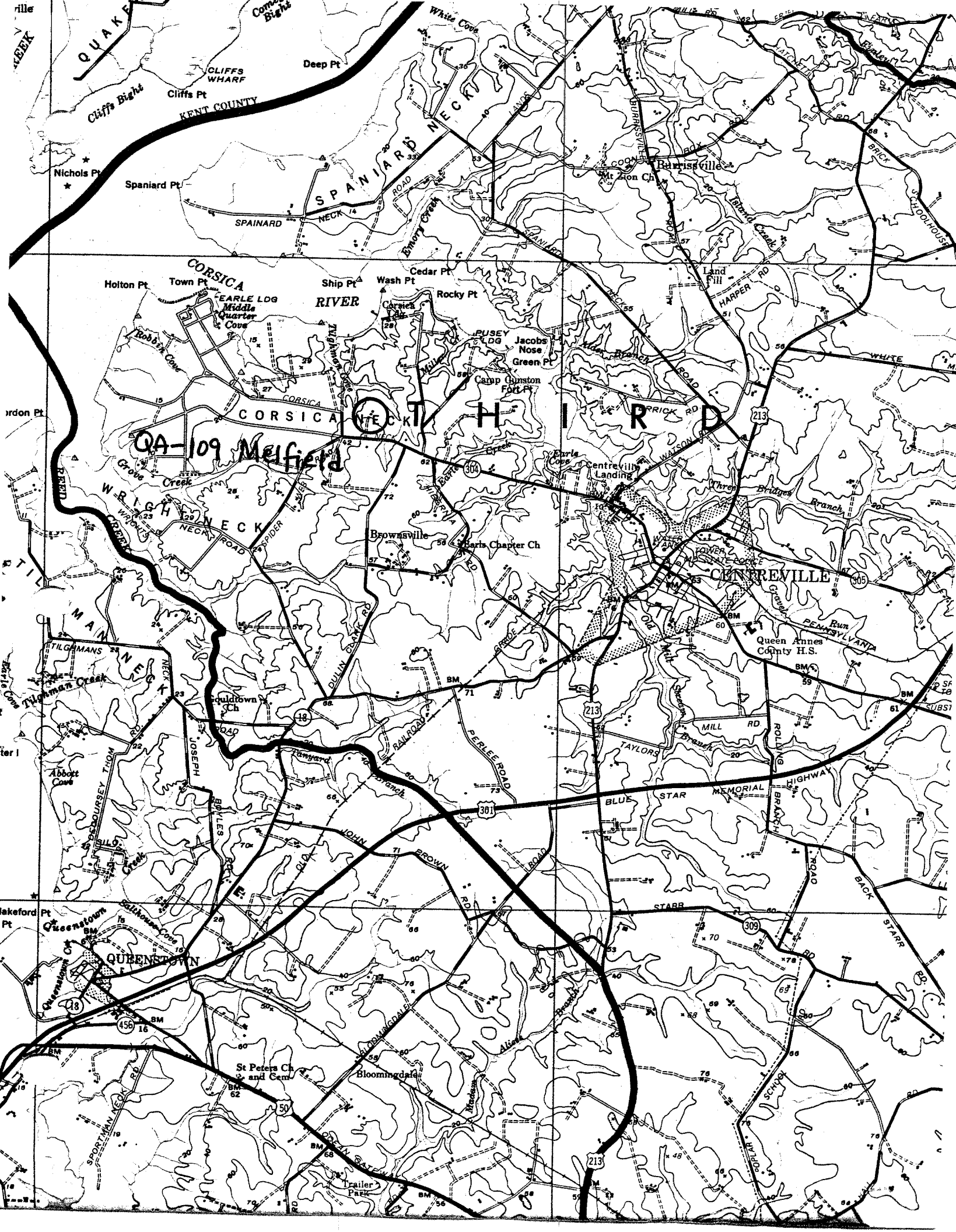
Inexorable time has wrought its changes here in the addition of this classic porch never envisioned by Melfield's Tilghman builder. It has removed the gigantic tree which in its already great size caught the eye of the same colonial. It has added to and added to until today's Melfield must dwarf its modest original. More recently it has taken the property out of Earle hands for those of strangers. Not all of it, though: the caretaker in residence very carefully explains that the cemetery still belongs to Earles. It does, indeed, and it always will. Time cannot erase the carvings of half a hundred stones—not in this generation anyhow.

QA-109
Meifield

Corsica Neck Road (MD R+304)

Corsica Landing, near Centreville

CENTREVILLE U.S. G.S. 7.5' Topographic Quadrangle



QA-109
Melfield

Mary McCarthy
Spring/Summer 2003
Digital color photo on file at MHT





QA-109 Melfield
Corsica Neck Road
Centreville vicinity
Orlando Ridout V 1980
View from Southeast



QA-109 Melfield
Corsica Neck Road
Centreville vicinity
Orlando Ridout V 1980
View from East



GA 109

Melfield

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